

What has happened is that religion has been cracked wide open by much that is new and brave in human thought -- most notably by science and psychology -- as well as by instruments that are old and ugly, such as persecution and political pressure. Within the dingy sarcophagus of piety there is dust and emptiness and death. But the wonderful, breathtaking thing Christians have to grasp about their faith is the teasing thing Saint Peter himself had to learn at Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. The truth is not safely moldering in the grave, but is marching on as valiantly as ever.

What seems clear is that within all denominations there is a new mutation of Christian (as yet only faintly discernable from the inert mass) who is willing and eager to question every item of his faith, who is bored to death with the old clichés, the old humbug, and the great herd of sacred cows, and who believes that to disable either his mind or his senses is to dishonor Christ. On the one hand he demands that Christians should give up being professional moralists, uttering windy platitudes to indifferent hordes of semi-believers; on the other hand he talks of finding Christ at the center of life. This way, for my money, evolution lies.

I cannot imagine a more enjoyable time to be alive, except possibly the first few centuries of the Church. For while the great holocaust is sweeping away much that is beautiful, and all that is safe and comfortable and unquestioned, it is relieving us of mounds of Christian bric-a-brac as well. Stripped of our nonsense, we may be almost like the early Christians, painting their primitive symbols on the walls of the catacombs: the Fish, the Loaves of Bread, the Cross, the monogram of Christ -- confident that in having done so they had described the necessities of life.

Monica Furlong, British Anglican writer who died in 2002 -- no favorite of the Archbishop!